

# *Sketch*

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## The Wheel

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# The Wheel

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## Abstract

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# The Wheel

THERE were three coke glasses on the table, two of them empty. Mary's long slim fingers wound nervously around the third one, rhythmically, monotonously swishing the ice around. Her dark eyelashes hung against her cheek emphasizing the shadows around her eyes and the cleft above her nose.

She heard Jan say, "Was he smiling at you or at me, Liz?" and laughed inside herself—a funny short laugh that left her tight and sick. She had looked up when he went by, had smiled back, and flinched at his impersonal glance, had wished again—

Liz was saying, "Isn't he cute?" and Mary remembered. Yes, he was cute. His hair was blonde and curly and his shoulders were broad. His mouth was just the right size for an easy smile and his hands were square and clean.

But then you saw his eyes.

Well, no—maybe you wouldn't. They weren't particularly large, and they were no browner than brown eyes usually were and his lashes were short and stubby and inconspicuous. No, Jan and Liz wouldn't notice them. Neither would any of the girls back at the dorm. The ones who raved so about him. The ones who'd "give anything for just one date with that darling Davie Shepard." Well, that was all right. She had said it herself once. The only difference was, she had *had* a date with him.

She looked up suddenly at Jan and Liz. They didn't know about that date—or the dates that followed. She hadn't told them. It would have led to complications.

"——I bet he'd be loads of fun."

"Well, quit betting. They say he's going steady."

"Yeah, I heard that, too."

"Wonder what she's like."

"Some big drip, no doubt—not nearly good enough for him."

"Naturally not."

Mary's mind winced. "O K, maybe I am a big drip," she thought. "Maybe I am crazy. I wish I were."

She took a sip of the coke, letting it burn slowly down her throat, stinging away the tightness. He was gone now, out the door, surrounded by laughing boys.

"I never see him with a girl."

Of course not. Not Davie. Girls were for dark corners where you could talk to them if you wanted to, or kiss them if you wanted to, or just ignore them and think about yourself.

"Well, he probably hasn't much time for girls. He's a pretty big wheel, you know."

Sure—big wheel. Editor, chairman, publicity director, business manager, president. Davie was good at that—a great guy—a "natural executive." He had a theory about that. If you got enough people working for you, and forgot about it hard enough, things would come out all right.

What about the time he had been general chairman for his fraternity house dance. The huge paper rose that hung from the ceiling had blown itself down in the middle of the dance and Mary had seen Davie's easy smile become thin hardness. Why couldn't he have laughed it off, or propped it up in a corner as if it were supposed to be there? But Davie couldn't. Davie had to throw the rose away with a hopeless shrug and heap insults and demerits on the pledges in the committee and look sad and lost all evening so that people said, "It's too bad that had to happen after Davie did such a beautiful job."

A beautiful job.

Davie had other theories, too. They were all good. Like the one about his folks. "They'll worry anyhow," he'd say, "so why knock yourself out to do what they want."

Or the one about studying. "What's the use of breaking your neck trying to get through in four years when your folks have the money to keep you in six?" So Davie took it easy. He knew all the tricks and all the professors and all the tests—he knew the *right* people.

And then there was his theory about politics. "Someone has to be—well, diplomatic. It might just as well be a good guy like me!"

Mary looked down at the ice in her coke. The ice bobbed

gently up and down, as if it were drowning. The coke tasted watery by now. Suddenly she pushed it away.

"Come on, kids. Let's go." She had to move, put on her bandana, pick up her books. She was dying inside.

Davie was rotten. He was no good.

That was tough wasn't it, Mary. How many times had she gone over and over it, telling herself, knowing it, believing it, accepting it, gritting her teeth against the thought of him.

Once after he had called her half an hour before a formal to say he couldn't make it, she had locked her roommate out and had spent hours telling him off in the darkness of her mind. But when she saw him, felt the slow warmth of his smile seep into her, she knew she couldn't ever say it.

Sometimes, when she let herself, Mary wondered how many more days—weeks maybe—or months, she'd go on telling herself how rotten he was.

And melting inside instead.

People had called it a purple cloud, a blue haze, a whirlpool, a dreamy heaven. They were wrong. Mary knew they were. It was a dull gray-green, with red sparks in it that clutched and choked and whispered to her at night, and wouldn't let her eat, and blurred the pages of her Chem book. That was for Mary. That was life. That was Hell.

Jan said, "Davie's a good guy. He'll go places some day."

—Margret Wallace, H. Ec., So.



## Melancholy Joy

I stood in the shadow of the caves. The liquid "plip" of the slowly dripping water added to the dreamy quality of the rain. A streetlight glowed through the misty, fog, fuzzy, indistinct, faintly flickering through the branches of a dripping tree. The billowing mist blanketed the ground, swelling here, then there, shifting in an endless roll that knew no time.

—Gerald H. McGraw, Sci. So.